The Sacraments of the New Testament

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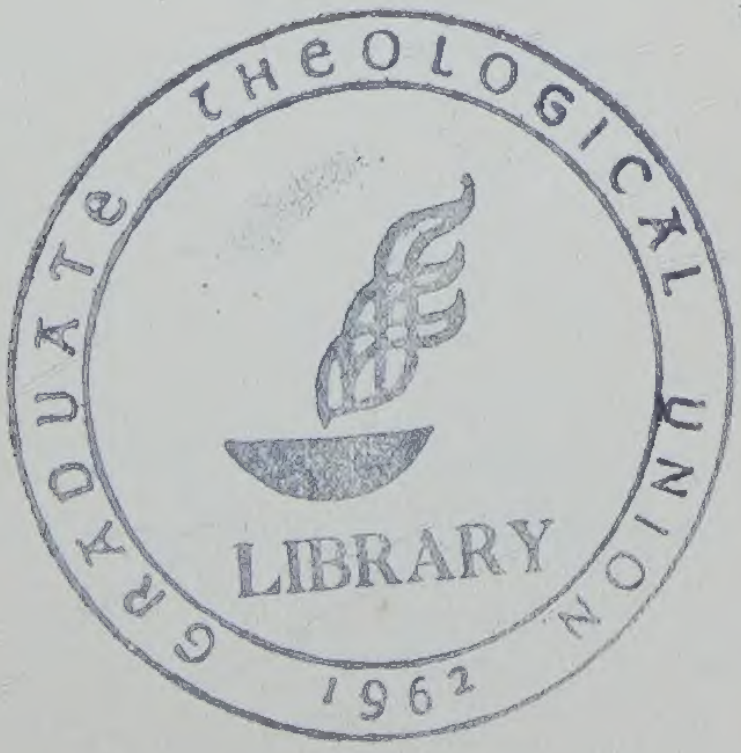

THE SACRAMENTS

Of the New Testament

BY THE

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WITH RECOMMENDATORY NOTE BY THE

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PREFACE

THE object which this little book is designed to serve is twofold. First, it aims at giving a simple statement of the view which, in common with all the branches of the Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church holds regarding the sacraments of the New Testament. Second, it is designed as a gift which ministers may put into the hands of those who are making profession of their faith for the first time, as a memorial of their First Communion. It is hoped that, in the form in which it is issued, and in its mode of statement, it may, with the blessing of Him who instituted both sacraments, serve these ends.

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RECOMMENDATORY NOTE

I HAVE great pleasure in recommending this little book, which contains in simple statement the common evangelical belief about the Sacraments of the Church as that is set forth in the Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformed Churches. I trust that it will prove a source of blessing and guidance to very many.

THOMAS M. LINDSAY.

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"On God's part the Sacraments are signs and seals; on our part they are a badge and a bond."

"We utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm Sacraments to be nothing else than naked and bare signs."

"The difference among evangelical Protestants as to the efficacy of the Sacraments, though they have unhappily caused much controversy and separation, are not really great or vital, and have been much exaggerated by misunderstanding and confusion of ideas."

The Sacraments of the New Testament

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits, and to confirm our interest in Him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His word.

There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.

Confession of Faith, chap. xxvii., 1, 4.

A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His Church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of His mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without.

The parts of a sacrament are two: the one an outward and sensible sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified.

The Larger Catechism, Qs. 162, 163.

A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

The sacraments of the New Testament are Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Shorter Catechism, Qs. 92, 93.

I.

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

IT is most desirable that we should have before our minds something more than the vague and unsatisfactory conception, in which too many people in our churches are content to rest, of the teaching of the church to which we belong concerning the Sacraments of the New Testament. And there is no reason why we should not be fully informed on that point, for there is a singular agreement between the various expositions in the catechisms of the Reformed Church, which, taken together, leave little or nothing more to be said upon the subject.

I.

They invite us to consider, in the first place, what the word *Sacrament* means. It is a theological and ecclesiastical, and not a biblical word. The term Sacrament is not found in Holy Scripture. We may take it as equivalent to the Greek word 'mystery,' as is done in the Vulgate, which is also the sense in which the term is applied to the Eleusinian and other rites of ancient Greece. Or it may stand for the Latin 'sacramentum,' the primary meaning of which was something sacred, and the secondary, the military oath which the Roman soldier took on entering the army of the emperor. In either case, it was a suitable term to apply to these rites of Christianity. For the sacraments are mysteries, observances that suggest the truths of our holy faith; and the baptized person and the communicant are taken bound as if by an oath, to be true to Christ, the Captain of their salvation, the Leader and Perfecter of their faith.

II.

The limitation of the use of this word to those rites only which were instituted by Christ Himself as binding on all Christians, helps us also to determine the question of the *number* of the Christian Sacraments. They are two in number: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The narratives of the institution of these two rites by our Lord Jesus Christ are found in the Gospels, and in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. In these narratives it is clear that, as the catechisms affirm, He "knit the sacramental bond between the sign and the thing signified." To this doctrine as to the number of the sacraments all the Reformers adhered. They thus rejected the other five ordinances to which, in the Greek and Roman churches, the term Sacrament is also applied—Confirmation, Penance, Ordination, Marriage, and Extreme Unction. Manifestly, on the Reformed view of what constitutes a sacrament, these five so-called sacraments "fall short of the true nature and function of sacraments," in that they were not instituted by Christ, and they also fail to exhibit that which constitutes a sacrament, the correspondence between outward and visible sign and inward and spiritual grace.

III.

Such, then, in view of the position taken up by the Reformed Churches, and to which we adhere, is our conception of a sacrament. "I take the word Sacrament," says Robert Bruce, an Edinburgh preacher in Reformation times, "as it is ta'en and used in the Kirk of God, for a holy sign and seal that is annexed to the preached Word of God, to seal up and confirm the truth contained in the same word, in such sort that I call not the seal separated from the word a sacrament. The word only cannot be a sacrament: the element only cannot be a sacrament: but word and element conjunctly make a sacrament: and so Augustine said well, 'Let the word come to the element and ye sall have a sacrament': then I call a sacrament the word and sign conjointly, the one hung to the other." A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which there is a sacramental bond between the sign and the thing signified; and this ideal of a sacrament is realised only in Baptism and in the Lord's Supper.

IV.

As the Reformation found men sharply divided regarding the *definition*, and consequently the *number*, of the sacraments, so is there a wide and essential division regarding their *nature* and *use*. This fundamental cleavage may be best got at if we note that characteristic and comprehensive phrase in the Shorter Catechism, in which it is set forth that in the sacraments Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant are "represented, sealed, and applied." The various sections of the visible Church may be said to agree that the sacraments do all these things; but their differences emerge according as it appears that some churches attach more prominence to one of these functions than to the others. Thus the contrast has been drawn in this way. Romanists hold that the sacraments represent grace because they apply it; Protestants that they apply grace because they represent it.[1] They differ also as to what spiritual blessings are thus represented or applied. The Reformed view is that "Christ and His benefits," "the benefits of His mediation," "Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant," are, in both the Christian sacraments,

1 *The Sacraments*, by Professor Candlish, D.D., p. 17.

conveyed to believing men by signs which appeal to the senses. As an early Church Father, Irenæus, puts it, "A whole Christ, with His whole benefits, gifts, and graces," is applied to the soul, because sealed and represented, in the sacraments. But the Romish view and teaching are that while, in a vague way, all the sacraments convey grace, each of the seven conveys its own special grace; and on this view the sacraments correspond to the various stages of the Christian life. Baptism thus stands related to its commencement, Confirmation to its maturity, Penance to its restoration when it has become impaired or lost, Ordination to the entrance to the holy ministry in the Church, Matrimony to the commencement of the married life, and Extreme Unction to the hour of death. At first this seems, no doubt, a very complete provision for the varied needs of the spiritual life, at its successive stages; but it implies the idea that grace is doled out, so to say, like a medicine, through outward ordinances. The view and teaching of the Reformed Church are that all grace is laid up for the soul in Christ, and is comprised in the expression "Christ and His benefits." Grace comes to us through Him, in the sacraments truly, and by means of them when rightly administered and duly received, but not only through them, for

Christ has various ways in which He makes the benefits of His mediation available for us.

V.

There then is a fundamental cleavage as to the ends to be served by the sacraments. One section of Christendom adopted seven sacraments, in which grace is vaguely conveyed at various stages of life. The other held to those two sacraments instituted by Christ, in which "Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers."

VI.

The framers of our catechisms showed much wisdom and discrimination in their choice of these three words—"represented, sealed, and applied." They suggest to us the threefold thought in which our Church's doctrine of the sacraments of the New Testament is summed up. We hold and teach, in harmony with all branches of the Reformed Church, that the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are *Signs*, *Seals*, and *Means of Grace*. (1) First, they are *signs*,

sensible signs, capable of being perceived and apprehended through the senses and organs of the body, marks, tokens, expressive symbols of Christ and His saving work. The water of baptism, the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, are natural and suggestive figures of the cleansing of the soul from sin, and its nourishment in Christ. Now, because they are signs, the sacraments of the New Testament *suggest* and *represent* the things they signify, but do not fully *explain* them. That is, they could have no meaning to those who had no knowledge of the truths they signify. A picture would be meaningless apart from the teaching of the book which it illustrates, or a monument without some knowledge of the event or person it has been erected to commemorate. So, if you have some previous knowledge of what the sacraments represent, they are all the more suggestive to you because they do little more than suggest these things. It is thus quite vital to our doctrine and belief on this subject to remember that word and sacrament are indissolubly linked to one another. In actual practice this is seen in the fact that the sacraments are administered after the reading and preaching of the Word of God. Even when the sacraments are administered in private,—as one of them too generally is, and as the other

may quite legitimately be, provided that, in both cases, there be a company of believers present,—it is most important that passages of Holy Scripture, setting forth the belief and practice of the Church, shall precede the private observance either of Baptism or of the Lord's Supper. (2) The sacraments are *seals*, not of the persons who partake of and receive them, but of the blessings which they represent. The seal is a metaphor taken from contracts. "Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith he had." "This is My body which is for you: this cup is the New Covenant in My blood: this do in remembrance of Me." A seal is that which confirms and ratifies a promise or engagement. Sacraments serve to seal and confirm the truth that is in the word. And because it is a seal annexed to the word it persuades me the better of the same. Therefore the familiar expression so often applied to the sacraments—"sealing ordinances"—is not strictly correct. They do not seal or imprint a stamp upon the person observing them, but they seal the word of the truth of the Gospel which they represent. The idea underlying a seal, in other words, is that of a personal sign or token. Before handwriting was common, a man's seal was his signature; and when our Lord said, "Go and

baptize ; do this in remembrance of Me," He gave the sacraments the position they hold as seals, personal tokens to us of His love. And this is just the aspect of the sacraments which most eludes definition. A sacrament, a seal, a love token, is a vague thing. It is the appeal which our most holy religion makes to our hearts, to the emotional side of us. For the health, the wholeness of our spiritual life depends on the due proportion between Christian feeling and Christian knowledge.

(3) But once more, the sacraments exhibit or apply the grace they signify and seal. They are *means of grace.* The Larger Catechism uses the word "exhibit" in the old English sense in which it is still employed in the technical language of medicine, as equivalent to 'administer' and 'apply.' The latter is the word used in the Shorter Catechism. "The sacrament exhibits and delivers the thing that it signifies to the soul and heart." "Exhibition is a real, effectual, lively application of Christ, and of all His benefits, to everyone that believeth, for the staying, strengthening, confirming, and comforting of the soul. This is the aspect of the sacraments in which we see them to be means of grace. The New Testament undoubtedly puts both sacraments in this position, as in the words, "buried with Him in

baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" Such words as these, taken with the experience of believers in every age of the blessing which the sacraments have brought to them, make it manifest that the Catechism completes its doctrine of the sacraments in saying that Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant are thereby *represented*, *sealed*, and *applied* to believers.

VII.

But how? "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith receive them."[1] Or, in the words of Calvin: "The sacraments perform their office only when accompanied by the Spirit, the internal Master, whose energy alone penetrates the heart, stirs up the affections, and procures access for the sacraments into our souls. If He

[1] *Shorter Catechism*, Q. 91.

is wanting, the sacraments can avail us no more than the sun shining on the eyeballs of the blind, or sounds uttered in the ears of the deaf." [1] In a word, the Spirit who Himself applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, makes use of the sacraments of the New Testament to confirm in us the faith which unites us to Christ, whose saving work they represent, and whose personal love they seal. And those who do receive this benefit by means of the observance of the sacraments are, as the Catechisms affirm, 'believers.' For "this is the name borne by those who *by faith* receive, depend, and rely upon Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life." It is used in the passages : "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women"; "Be thou an example of the believers." (Acts v. 14 ; Tim. iv. 12.) This name settles the question as to whether the sacraments are "regenerating and converting ordinances." They are not ; but are appointed for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. It is for that end that we partake of them ; and in them we also testify our engagement to be the Lord's. "The sacrament is appointed," says Bruce, "that we may get a better grip of Christ than we get in the simple word. The sacraments are appointed

[1] Calvin's *Institutes*, vol. ii., p. 497.

that we may have Him more fully in our souls: that He may make the better residence in us"—or, in the words of the Apostle, "that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith—that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able with all saints to comprehend the breadth and length, the depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God."

VIII.

The doctrine of the Reformed Church concerning the sacraments of the New Testament is therefore perfectly definite, and holds its way straight between the magical and moral theories. The former ascribes to the sacraments an inherent virtue, a power of spiritual virtue apart altogether from the faith of the receiver. According to the latter, they exert merely a moral influence through the presentation to mind and heart of the truths they symbolise Of course, on the view held by the Reformed Churches, it is not easy, nor is it necessary, to define the way in which the Spirit makes the sacraments an effectual means of building up believers in holiness and comfort, through faith,

unto salvation. The whole work of the Spirit is mysterious. And, if we could altogether remove from the sacraments the element of mystery that surrounds them, they would cease to be to us the suggestive ordinances they are.

The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized.

The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.

The Confession of Faith, chap. xxviii., 1, 4, 6.

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

The Larger Catechism, Q. 165.

Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

The Shorter Catechism, Q. 94.

II.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

BAPTISM, like the Lord's Supper, is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Every covenant which God made with men from the first had a sign as well as a word of promise connected with it, the sign making the word clearer and surer. And every covenant included the child with the parent. So was it in the covenant with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Israel—and so with believers now under the Gospel.

This is the principle on which our teaching and practice in the matter of baptism are based —the oneness of parents and children in God's covenant: "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." In the sacrament of Baptism, which is a sign and seal of God's new covenant, "the promise," both

in word and sign, "is unto you and to your children." God says to us, as of old to Abraham, "This is the token of the covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee." He is the Lord God, merciful and gracious, who, "like as a father pitieth his children," still thinks of the little ones who "cannot discern between their right hand and their left," but who has a special care for the children of His believing people. To this gracious and welcome truth about God the sacrament of Baptism bears constant witness.

II.

If this then is the principle which underlies the sacrament of Baptism, two points that need explanation are immediately cleared up. We at once see why there is no express command given in the New Testament to baptize the infants of believing parents. In the New Testament we have no precise directions about Baptism, but only Christ's general command to baptize converts from all nations, because the new covenant rests on the old, and in the new, as in the old, the child is included with the parent. And because of their birth in Christian families, the

children of Christian parents are recognised, and receive this sacrament because we recognise them as belonging to the kingdom of God. "Of such," said the Master — and the saying covers our position — "is the kingdom of God.' In other words, we baptize the children of Christian parents because they are, in virtue of that simple fact, members of the Church. Baptism is the Church's recognition of the church membership of children. So our Church has said, and rightly: "Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, but the infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptized."

III.

The principle on which our doctrine of Baptism rests, settles also the question of the duties and profession of parents in presenting their children to be baptized. "The child of professedly Christian parents is baptized, not because parents or sponsors have made a profession of faith in name of the child, but simply because he is the child of Christian parents, and has been born in a

Christian home. The parent, indeed, who presents his child for baptism does so as a believer in Christ—but he makes no vicarious profession of faith, nor does he enter into a covenant in the name of the child. He professes his own faith, and promises faithful performance of his own duty as a Christian parent to bring up his children for the Lord. The parent does not come in as a surety between the Saviour and his child—the Lord deals directly with the child, by giving to him the seal of His promises of grace as addressed to him, and laying him under the solemn obligations of the covenant. The parent's duty is indeed most important, and his obligation to it most solemn; but it is not the duty of answering for his children, or undertaking obligations in their name, but of discharging his own part, teaching them the meaning of Baptism and the blessed promises of which it is a token, and seeking to lead them by all the persuasive and powerful means of parental training, influence, and example, to receive the grace of Christ, and walk in it. So true and scriptural is this principle, that it is interesting to observe that John Bunyan, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, though he was a Baptist, yet recognises the general principle that other Evangelical Churches regard as involved in the

Baptism of the infant children of believers. When Christian comes to the house Beautiful, which represents the Church visible, he is examined by Piety, Prudence, and Charity as to his fitness—and after the two former had questioned him, 'Then said Charity to Christian, Have you a family? Are you a married man? Christian—I have a wife and four small children. Charity—And why did you not bring them along with you? Then Christian wept and said, O how willingly would I have done it, but they were all of them utterly averse to my going on pilgrimage.' Then follows a further conversation on this subject—and he is not admitted till he has shown that he has done all that he could to induce them to come with him. This is a very beautiful illustration of the principle that when a man becomes a Christian, he ought to bring all his family with him. The practice that we follow might indeed be more appropriately described as household Baptism than as infant Baptism. Its principle is that the families of professing Christians are to be Christian families. That Baptism was used as the appointed symbol and seal of believers' families being thus Christian, seems to be a natural inference from the fact of families as such being baptized."[1] Of Lydia it is

[1] *The Sacraments*, by Prof. Candlish, D.D., pp. 68–70.

said, "she was baptized, and her household." Of the Philippian jailer, "he was baptized, he and all his." And Paul says, "I baptized the household of Stephanas."

IV.

But while the profession and duties of parents in Christian Baptism are thus defined, and limited to a profession of their own faith, and a promise to discharge faithfully their parental duties, yet the principle of the unity of the family in the covenant entitles us to say, that if, as a result of their Baptism and Christian nurture in church and home, the children of Christians do not grow up to be themselves Christians, there is a strong presumption that there has been some unfaithfulness or shortcoming on the part of the parents. Therefore, on the occasion of the administration of this sacrament, we may fitly say, not only to him who is presenting his child, but to all parents —'See that you have an interest in the covenant of which Baptism is the sign and seal. Take hold afresh of Christ, in whom all its promises have their yea and amen, as you seek the sign of the covenant for your child, or as you remember how you brought your little ones for Baptism, as

our brother brings his to-day. This is a believer's privilege. It is on the ground of a profession of faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, that we administer this sacrament. The covenant blessings are as sure as the faithfulness of God, if there is faith on your part to lay hold of them. It is a disciple's ordinance, a token from the Lord's own hand of His love for you and yours. And a disciple is one who has come into the school of Christ, and is willing to learn of Him, and to follow Him in all things.'

V.

"Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit—of adoption and resurrection unto everlasting life—and whereby the persons baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's."[1] It is, as some one has called it, 'a visible sermon' on sin, and cleansing

[1] *Larger Catechism*, Q. 165.

and consecration. The Lord Jesus is saying to us, and His words apply as truly to little ones as to men and women—"Ye must be born again." In the sprinkling of the water of baptism the promise is renewed to us—"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." Therefore, as often as they present children for Baptism, Christian parents profess anew their faith in these foundation truths of our most holy faith. The signs repeat the words to us. They seal the promise to faith. And Baptism is not only a visible sermon on sin and cleansing—it is also a token of consecration, of our being the Lord's, as bought with His blood, and bound therefore in love, and loyalty, and service, unto Him. A pledge on the part of God in Christ to us—it is not less really a pledge on our part of our allegiance to Him.

VI.

What, then, of its efficacy? What good, we sometimes hear it asked, does it do to baptize a child? In the case of one baptized after he has come to years, "there is no great difficulty in believing that when one who has just come to faith in Christ receives an ordinance so full of

meaning and tenderness as Christian Baptism, his faith is strengthened, and he is enabled by it to enter into closer fellowship with Christ. But there is a peculiar difficulty in explaining the efficacy of Baptism in the case of infants—and the scriptural requirement of faith for the right and profitable reception of the sacrament is the strongest objection against the practice of infant Baptism. If we cannot show that Baptism can be a means of grace to those to whom it is administered in infancy, it will be very difficult to believe that our Lord or His Apostles intended any but adults to be baptized." In order to show that Baptism is not a useless form in the case of the infant himself, we have to remember a principle which is very clearly stated in the Confession of Faith, where it is finely and wisely said—'The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered.' Remembering that, we are able to realise how it may become effectual to the growing child. Parents must have found how eagerly and how early a child loves to be told about his baptism —how dearly he loves to be taken to church to see other children baptized—and how wonderfully, and in almost an unconscious manner, he thus comes to learn the great truths which Baptism signifies to the mind and heart. In

other words, it is one of the many ways in which a child, as he grows up, may take in a spiritual lesson by the eye. As a token also of God's love to him, his Baptism is a very precious heritage to the growing child. You can imagine a child having a gift, say, of a Bible, presented to him when he is an infant. It is of no immediate use to him. It will be many years before he can read it, or appreciate the love which bestowed it upon him. But the child can ere long understand and feel this, and he will be all the more sensible of the love of the giver, because he received the keepsake so long before he could understand or value it. So it is with the Sacrament of Baptism. It is all the more precious and useful as a seal of God's covenant, a token of His love, because it is given from earliest infancy, and testifies of a love that has met us at the outset of life, of a Saviour who has been waiting and ready to receive us ever since we had a being. In this way it really benefits the soul of the receiver, though given in unconscious infancy, benefits him all the more as a seal of God's grace, just because it has been given in infancy, its efficacy not being tied to the moment of time when it is administered. We do not sufficiently realise how quickly the heart and affections of a little child may open up

to understand such a tender thought as the value and meaning of a keepsake. Baptism, therefore, is graciously fitted to educate the growing affections of a child, and to cherish and strengthen those feelings to which it appeals so winsomely.

VII.

How is our Baptism to be improved by us? The Larger Catechism gives the full and suggestive answer—"The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein—by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of Baptism and our engagements; by growing up to assurance and pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and

quickening of grace; and by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ—and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body."[1] In this answer two occasions are mentioned when the duty of making practical use of our Baptism is specially incumbent on us. One is in the time of temptation. As a help to faith and Christian life, this ordinance is specially needful and useful when these are assailed and endangered. It is to the Christian what the soldier's arms and weapons are in the moment and surprise or attack by the enemy. The Baptism of our Lord immediately preceded His temptation in the wilderness. The other is when we are present at the administration of Baptism to others. "The administration of the sacrament does not concern merely the children to be baptized, or the parents who present them, but the whole baptized Church there present. This is too often forgotten, even by ministers, as well as by the people, and our baptismal service too much limited, as is that of the Church of England, to a reference to the infants and those who present them." Our Presbyterian Directory for Public

[1] *Larger Catechism*, Q. 167.

Worship enjoins the minister "to admonish all who are present to look back to their Baptism —to repent of their sins against their covenant with God—to stir up their faith—to improve and make right use of their Baptism, and of the covenant sealed thereby betwixt God and their souls." Let us then seriously consider the meaning and purpose of this ordinance, as proclaiming to us the gift of the Holy Ghost—the unity of the Church of Christ—the necessity of holiness. Let us meditate, not only on the ordinance in general, but on our own Baptism, the blessings of which it is the sign and seal, and the obligations it lays upon us, as well as the promises it sets before us. Let us repent as we are conscious how deeply we have fallen from the grace of Baptism, and from our later engagements to be the Lord's. Let us not forget how the Apostles said, "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." Let us be reminded by this sacrament that the forgiveness of sins is a great and constant fact, that Christ our Saviour is still present, still loving, still longing to wash us and make us clean. Let this sacrament be, as it is fitted to be, one of the means by which our faith may grow up to full assurance of the love and grace of God our Saviour; and as we

are baptized into Christ, unto the name of Christ, let us remember that we are bound therefore to be His, separate from an ungodly world, and living for Him who gave Himself for us. By Baptism let us bind ourselves, and strengthen and encourage ourselves, and one another, to all the duties of a Christian life and walk.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.

Confession of Faith, chap. xxix., 1.

One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labour to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened.

The Larger Catechism, Q. 172.

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, His death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

The Shorter Catechism, Q. 96.

III

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

IN these statements of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, taken from the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, we find all that needs to be said regarding the second of the sacraments of the New Testament. They are not always sufficiently understood, or fully and intelligently accepted, as setting forth our Presbyterian view of the Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Many Presbyterian communicants, if they give any thought at all to the meaning of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, will find that a much fuller doctrine is taught in the Catechisms and Standards of our Church than they are at all aware of.

I.

In all the three statements it is referred to under the scriptural and sufficient designation, 'The Lord's Supper.' And the first thing impressed on our minds in each of them is that 'the Lord's Supper is a sacrament.' All that is connected with it must be understood in the light of that single fact. And as 'a sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ,' we are sent back, as being of primary importance to our understanding of the Lord's Supper, to the account given of its institution. This is found in four distinct narratives,[1] of which the most important and authoritative, and also the oldest, is that of St. Paul in the eleventh chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. From this, the earliest narrative of its institution, we learn that the night before the Cross –'the same night in which He was betrayed'—while He sat at meat with His disciples, Jesus took bread and wine, and declared them to be, sacramentally, His body and blood. They were taken to represent, seal, and apply His death to all believing souls; and Christians are thereby enjoined, by a frequent

[1] Matt. xxvi. 26–30; Mark xiv. 22–26: Luke xxii. 14–23; 1 Cor. xi. 23–34.

repetition of the actions done that night by Jesus, to keep alive His memory, and specially the remembrance of His Cross and Passion, until His second advent. The passage in Paul is a simple directory to the Corinthian and other Christians how to observe the Lord's Supper ; and everything about it implies that at the time the Apostle was writing—A.D. 58—this commemorative feast formed part of the settled order of the Church. There are some bodies of Christian people and some expositors of Scripture who hold that in this historical act performed by Jesus on the last night of His life, we are not to see an injunction for all time to come, but only an affecting picture of His approaching Passion, not necessarily to be repeated. But, while this might stand as a sufficient explanation of the narratives of the last supper in the Gospels, it overlooks the fact that, if any weight is to be given to the early chapters in the Acts of the Apostles, the Lord's Supper must be regarded as a rite practised by the Christians from the beginning. Nor does it explain how manifestly St. Paul, in giving his injunctions regarding its observance, assumed that the words "Do this in remembrance of Me" had put the Christian Church under a permanent obligation to keep this feast.

II.

The position of St. Paul's narrative in 1 Corinthians suggests to us at once the unique position which the Lord's Supper occupies as an evidence of Christianity. Here is something that takes us back by an unbroken succession to the evening before the Crucifixion. "From the day of Pentecost onwards the Lord's Supper has been observed by the whole Christian Church in every age and clime. Mighty empires have risen and fallen: vast changes have passed over the face of human society: but through all time and change this simple ordinance has survived, linking the successive generations of the faithful in one glorious and undivided fellowship, and transmitting from age to age the proclamation of the Lord's death. In the golden chain of communions which stretches across the centuries there is no break, and as it has been in the past, so it will be in the future, till He come." [1] We are thus at the outset impressed by the evidential value of the Lord's Supper. It is an irresistible proof of the actual occurrence of the event which it is intended to commemorate, and of the meaning

[1] *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments*, by Norman Macleod, D.D., p. 91.

which the first disciples attached to the death of Christ.

Let us look, then, at this historic monument of the religion of Jesus, and see the inscription it bears. In the Lord's Supper there is a Proclamation of Christ's death, and a Participation by faith, on the part of the worthy receivers of His body and blood.

III.

PROCLAMATION.—"His death is showed forth. Ye proclaim the Lord's death. Before our eyes Jesus Christ is evidently set forth, crucified."

(1) The mere elements standing on the Table show forth the death of Christ—as a fact. Even the children could tell us what they stand for. They are signs of Christ's death, of the fact that He died; and also of the *kind* of death He died. For there are two elements, and they stand side by side, separate, and to be taken separately. They represent His body and blood, and speak, therefore, of a death which took place by violence. For body and blood are one in life, and become separate things only by death: and not by every kind of death, but by one whose manner involves blood-shedding. All this is proclaimed

KNOX BAPTIST DIVINITY SCHOOL
SANDFORD FLEMING

by the elements themselves, even before a word is spoken. But so far as the message of the bare elements is concerned, the death they proclaim might be the death of one who is still dead. There is nothing in the elements themselves to indicate either that the death was of the nature of a sacrifice, or that it is a death in the benefits of which we have a share. Let the elements alone stand before us, and let nothing be done with them or said about them, and they would simply suggest death by violence, endured, it may be, with conspicuous moral heroism, but nothing more.

(2) But we do not merely look at the elements standing on the Table as a kind of silent spectacle. They are given and received, and their distribution is accompanied by the Master's explanatory words, 'Take,' 'Eat,' 'Drink,' 'For you,' 'For the remission of the sins of many.' And then the whole service becomes vocal. And as every sign presents one thing to the senses and brings another into the mind, so these elements, remaining to our senses bread and wine, become to us, in thought, the body and blood of Jesus ; and now we feel that in the Supper there is proclaimed not merely the fact that Jesus died, but the character of His death as one in the benefits of which we share. In the act of giving,

—as in the name and with the authority of Christ the minister gives the elements to the communicants, — with the words, 'Take, Eat, Drink,' there is represented the full, free offer of Christ with all His benefits : and in the reception of these elements, as they pass from hand to hand, we have a picture of the personal acceptance and appropriation of Christ Himself.

(3) But there is a further step still in this proclamation of the death of Christ. For the action is not yet complete. The bread and wine must not be distributed only, but eaten and drunk. Till the elements are partaken of, the service is no more to the communicants than to onlookers. As the bread and wine must pass into us and be assimilated, so there is proclaimed in the Supper the great truth that we must be partakers of Christ in His death. And so the giving and receiving and partaking complete the picture of Christ's death presented in the Lord's Supper. For no mere exhibition of that death has served its purpose until, by means of it, we have been led into the heart, and the believing acceptance, of the thought of St. Paul : "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live : yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Therefore the Lord's Supper sends us to the Cross, and sets the death of our dear Lord before us as a death by which we

live, and speaks vividly to us of the life that comes to us through our union with Christ in His death. "The chief and almost whole energy of the sacrament," says Calvin, "consists in these words, 'broken for you,' 'shed for you.'"

(4) There is no doubt therefore as to what is 'exhibited' in the Lord's Supper. Using that word in its old English sense, we already see that the things which are represented in this sacrament—Christ and His benefits—are not only depicted, but sealed and made over to all believing recipients of the sacred elements. The Lord's Supper is a seal as well as a sign, a seal to His disciples, of His love in giving Himself to them. It is the Master's 'keepsake,' standing to His word of promise, as a seal to a document, as the marriage ring to the marriage vow or promise. "Nothing is added to the extent or terms of the promise by the ring: it means no more than has already been spoken: but it puts the same promise in a visible form, giving a more lively impression, and remaining after the word has died from the air and can only be remembered."

Such, then, is the ordinance and the things it shows forth, as it was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ the night before the Cross. "Sitting that night among His disciples, His heart went

out towards them with the longing of unutterable love. He wished to be wholly theirs, so that He could not but represent Himself by the very bread they were eating, and gave Himself to them as He gave the bread. And He knew that they loved Him and would remember Him. He knew that the death He was to die would draw all men unto Him, would fill the despairing with hopes of purity and happiness, would cause countless sinners to say to themselves with soul-subduing wonder, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'" [1] It is a feast, therefore, to be observed with thanksgiving. The minister, in the Communion service of the Church of England, is directed to say: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart by faith with thankfulness. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee, and be thankful." It is, in the old Greek word for the sacrament, 'Eucharist,' a thanksgiving—in the corresponding Latin phrase, '*actio gratiarum*,' an act of thanks. The communicant goes to the Table saying: "I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." While seated at the Table, he is exclaiming: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." And he goes out from the

[1] *The Lord's Supper*, by Prof. Marcus Dods, D.D., p. 9.

Table with the song on his lips and in his heart: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." The Lord's Supper thus takes its place as the supreme act of Christian worship. It is the service by which Christ is brought so near to the soul of the believer that he feels himself to be seated with Him in heavenly places. It unites the Church on earth with the Church in glory, in one great anthem of praise, as no other service does. Our Communion hymns blend, as do no other songs, with the theme of the adoring hosts above, who cry, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" In almost all the ancient offices we find the sacramental doxology: "Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be unto Thee, O Lord Most High."

IV.

PARTICIPATION.—Besides the things *represented* in the Lord's Supper there is something also which is *received*. And that is set forth in these words: "And the worthy receivers are, not after a

corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of His body and blood with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace." "The cup of blessing which we bless," says St. Paul, "is it not a communion of the blood of Christ: the bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?"

(1) The Lord's Supper, in other words, is not a mere representation of Christ, or a bare commemoration of His death: it is the communion of the body and blood of Christ. In the old Scottish Confession of Faith, it is finely said: "The Supper declareth that God, as a most provident Father, doth not only feed our bodies, but also spiritually nourish our souls with the graces and benefits of Jesus Christ." In the Book of Common Order, John Knox says in his address before Communion: "As the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament--for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood, then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us, we be one with Christ, and Christ with us,—so is the danger great if we receive the same unworthily." And Calvin says: "God has given a sacrament to His Church by the hand of His only begotten Son, a spiritual feast, at which Christ testifies that He is the living

Bread, on which our souls can feed, for a true and blessed immortality. Our souls are fed by Christ, just as our bodies are nourished by bread and wine." It is from such thoughts that we have got our most familiar, as it is also our most tender and appropriate, name for this sacrament—'The Communion.' What do we mean by that? Not, certainly, that, as the Church of Rome teaches, the elements by consecration are 'changed into' the literal body and blood of Christ. Nor, with the Lutheran Church, that, after consecration, the glorified body of Christ, being ubiquitous, is 'in, with, and under' the elements. Nor yet, as is widely taught and believed now in the Church of England, though it is not the doctrine of the Prayer Book, that the consecrated bread 'has under its form' the presence of the glorified body. The root error of these views is the idea of a real Presence of Christ *in the elements* of Communion, after they have been consecrated. But while we reject the idea of a real Presence of Christ *in the elements*, we believe and teach a real Presence of Christ *in the sacrament*. By this we mean nothing magical or material, but that, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Christ is spiritually present to those who believe. We mean no more than this, but it is most necessary to impress the assertion

that this is really meant. For there can be little doubt that many Presbyterians who observe the Lord's Supper fall far short of entering into its true significance as a Communion Service. To many among us the Lord's Supper is merely and only a commemorative ordinance. But St. Paul goes beyond that, as do also the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. They teach that, in this sacrament, there is an actual present communion between Christ and the soul. A friend of mine lately told me of a conversation he once had with an old Presbyterian lady abroad, who, with an air of unimpeachable orthodoxy, assured him that the Lord's Supper was merely a commemoration. He endeavoured, in his reply, to give her a fuller view, and, without saying so, confined himself to the language of the Westminster Standards, only to receive the rejoinder, 'Oh, but you are very High Church.' His answer, in turn, was, 'Although you have lived so many years out of Scotland, I can hardly believe that you have forgotten your Catechism.' Now, I believe that to be but one case out of many. And possibly it may be accounted for, partly by the fact that the communion between believers and their Lord in the Sacrament of the Supper is not easy to define, and partly by the fact that the Presbyterian type

of mind (though, of course, it is not confined to Presbyterians), is one that finds it hard to believe in spiritual good coming to anybody except through truth presented directly to the understanding. And the person in whom that type of mind is developed unduly will never appreciate the Communion. For it is so far true that it is "a social meal, touched with a certain breath of mysticism." We must remember, even though we were brought up in a faith that desires to understand all mysteries, that there is such a thing as receiving blessing, and yet not fully understanding the process by which we receive it. The literature of our time is teaching us to attach importance to subconscious regions of our being, and in this connection we feel the force of it. One may be receiving blessing when one is not directly conscious of it, and it is always idle for one to say, 'I didn't *feel* a bit better for partaking of the Lord's Supper.' One of the wise parts of the teaching of our Standards regarding the sacraments is that the blessing is not tied to the moment of their administration. Or, as an old writer has it: "Do not wonder that the Thing sometimes precedes the Sacrament, since sometimes it follows long after." We may be content to leave the How and Why of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the

Lord's Supper unexplained: but Christian experience, not to speak of our Church's Standards, insists on our believing in its reality—"The hour spent at the Table of Holy Communion is a blessed hour of remembrance, of meditation: but it is also more. It is an hour in which He speaks to us, and, as it were, sensibly touches us, in the ordinance of, not our invention, but His command. The holy Bread, the holy Cup, are received as from His hand, as truly, to our faith, as they were received at the first administration. The disciple literally in them 'touches his salvation,' in its attesting and lawfully conveying seal. He goes forth fed and refreshed with Jesus Christ, who has thus solemnly made over to him His finished sacrifice, with its innumerable benefits."[1] There are some to whom this can never be made to seem intelligible. 'The love of Jesus, what it is none but His loved ones know.' But to the demand for perfect clearness of sacramental doctrine the sufficient answer may be given in the words of Calvin: "Should anyone ask me as to the mode, I will not be ashamed to confess that it is too high a mystery for my mind to comprehend, or for words to express: and, to speak more plainly, I rather feel than understand

[1] *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, by H. C. G. Moule, D.D., p. 242.

it. The truth of God therefore, in which I can safely rest, I here embrace without controversy. He declares that His flesh is the meat and His blood the drink of my soul. I give my soul to Him to be fed with such food: in His sacred Supper He bids me take, eat, and drink His body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I have no doubt that He will truly give, and I receive." [1]

"The communion that believers have with Christ at His Table," says the late Professor Candlish, "may be illustrated by what He said to His disciples at the first Communion Table: 'He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: if a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.' Something like this we find where there is strong affection and mutual understanding and trust between men, even by the working of our mental and moral constitution. If a man can have communion in thought with his fellow-mortal who is dead and gone, and only present to the mind by his recorded remembered words, who shall doubt that there may be a far more real and intimate communion between our spirits and that Saviour who is not dead, but

[1] Calvin's *Institutes*, vol. ii., p. 589.

living, and everywhere present? Instead of the mere working of memory, affection, and imagination, we have the agency of the Spirit of God, who has direct access to our spirits, and who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Thus there is a real though spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and a real fellowship of our souls with Him. It is true indeed that his spiritual communion with Christ, by which the life of our souls is nourished, is not confined to the Lord's Supper, but is realised by every Christian as often as he exercises faith in Christ as his Redeemer. Few Christians, it may be believed, have not felt that they have had as close and blessed communion with Christ at other times as they ever had at the Lord's Table, in some hour of heart-searching meditation, or in a time of sickness, when the Saviour is with them, or by the deathbed of some Christian friend, when the Lord has been strengthening him and bringing the realities of His grace into clear and vivid light. But, on the other hand, there are few Christians who will not feel that in the ordinary tenor of their lives, when they have to be occupied with the business and cares of life, it is not easy to maintain close fellowship with Christ, and that the simple but touchingly suggestive symbols of the Lord's Supper do help

them to such spiritual communion as they cannot ordinarily maintain without them."[1]

(2) The statements in our Catechisms do not fail to remind us that the same sacrament which exhibits our relationship to Christ and communion with Him, also exhibits very beautifully the union of Christians in one body, and our communion with one another. "They that worthily communicate testify their mutual love and fellowship each in the other, as members of the same mystical body." "By giving and receiving bread and wine." "Take this, and divide it among yourselves." "For we, being many, are one body, one bread: for we are all partakers of that one bread." The social character of the Lord's Supper is an essential part of its significance. Writers on the subject of Sacrifice are unanimous in pointing out that the idea which originally lay at the root of it is that of *sacramental communion*, "the establishment or confirmation of a living bond between the worshippers and their God."[2] "The *community* is especially prominent in the eucharistic rite, whose significance is quite expressly connected (1 Cor. x.) with common participation—a fact

[1] *Candlish on the Sacraments*, pp. 117–120.

[2] W. R. Smith, quoted by Gore in *The Body of Christ*, p. 13.

recognised by our Church in the strict prohibition of a solitary eucharist, even in the hour of death."[1] The very word *communion* signifies a partaking together. Our phrase for the act of observing the Lord's Supper is *communicate*. It is a feast in which there is *communicating*.

> "Sweet solemn hour! The only sound
> The sacred symbols passing round,
> Offering by turns on Jesus' part
> The Cross to every hand and heart."

This aspect of the sacrament is provided for in a very marked way in our Presbyterian form of worship, where a social table takes the place of an altar, as in other churches. Sitting together at a common board, we remember the family character of the service, that it links us to our brethren in Christ over all the world, and to every family of believing souls in heaven and on earth. For of the Christian Church everywhere we sing, "One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food." And this mutual fellowship leads us to the most inspiring of all thoughts which come to us at a Communion Table, our "mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won." In the prayer of intercession which is part of the Church of England Communion

[1] Moule's *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, p. 240.

service, there occurs that grand sentence, that sounds the victorious thought without which our sacramental meditation can never be complete: "and we also bless Thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear, beseeching Thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that *with them* we may be partakers of Thy Heavenly Kingdom." And so our song rises in our service on a Communion Day: "Glory be to Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. Glory be to Him in the Church which waiteth for Him, and in the Church which is around Him."

V.

Two other thoughts are necessary to complete our view of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. They gather round the two words, Consecration and Expectation.

(1) The profession of faith made by the communicant binds him to the Lord in a new covenant, the central idea of which is that of *Consecration.* We read that Moses "took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And

Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." This covenant was broken by the children of Israel so often and so completely that the greatest of prophetic promises was that of "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. For this is the covenant that I will make with them, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be My people . . . and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." This covenant was also, in the fulness of time, ratified with blood, but no longer the blood of bulls and goats, but the precious blood of Christ, the blood of sprinkling, the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot unto God. "This," He said, in instituting the Lord's Supper, "is the new covenant in My blood. This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for the remission of the sins of many." On our part, then, this covenant implies an obligation. That obligation is expressed by St. Paul in the words, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service."

The communicant binds himself, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as if by an oath, to be true to Christ, the Captain of his salvation, the Leader and Perfecter of his faith. So we consecrate ourselves to His service—intelligently, considerately, humbly—engaging in His strength to walk obediently in the way of His commandment. And, after every Communion, we should remind ourselves of our Communion promise, "I have said that I will keep Thy words." This we owe, to our Lord, who is ever faithful to His covenant with us, and to the world, which is always watching to see if we are faithful to our covenant with Him. Of the early Christians it is said, "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." There is an old legend in the Talmud that when the worshippers came forth from the temple, the odour of its incense clung to their garments. Let the odour of a true consecration breathe through our inward and outward Christian life. That is a fine part of the Communion Service of the Church of England in which the communicants say, "And here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto Thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy communion, may be fulfilled with Thy grace and heavenly

benediction." "Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His name." "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

> "Is not God's oath upon your head
> Ne'er to sink back on slothful bed,
> Never again your loins untie
> Or let your torches waste and die,
> Till, when the shadows thickest fall,
> You hear your Master's midnight call?"

(2) The other thought gathers round the word *Expectation*: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." The Lord's Supper is not a *memorial* only, but a *hope*. With one hand it points back to the Cross: with the other it points forward to the Throne. "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." In the early Church the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was one of the things which kept so vividly before the hope of the Christians the second coming of the Lord. That prospect has faded largely from our thoughts. Yet it is still for us our *hope*. The Lord's Supper marks the horizon of Christian life and service. In it we have a

pledge—not only of our complete salvation in Christ—of the reunion of believing souls in the glory that is to be revealed to us, but also of the hope that when Christ appears we also shall appear with Him in glory.

> " 'Till He come,' O let the words
> Linger on the trembling chords:
> Let the little while between
> In their golden light be seen;
> Let us think how heaven and home
> Lie beyond that, 'Till He come.' "

Communion for the First Time

IV.

COMMUNION FOR THE FIRST TIME

IT is well that we should have a clear idea and a deep sense of the permanent obligation resting upon Christians to observe the Lord's Supper, and in endeavouring to obtain this, it will be well to consider the place of this Sacrament as an integral part of church worship, or, as it has recently been termed, "the very apex and crown of all Christian public worship." [1]

I.

Its place in the Church is determined by our conception of the Church, as that is derived from the New Testament. Into that conception there enters, first, the idea of *Fellowship*. "The Church of Christ is a fellowship with Jesus

[1] *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, by Principal Lindsay, D.D., p. 36.

Christ: that is the divine element in it. It is a fellowship with the brethren: that is the human element in it."[1] A Christian is in fellowship with the Lord, and with the society which bears His name. One of the earliest yearnings of the new-born Christian soul is the yearning for fellowship, for the company and society of "the Brethren," which is the suggestive title for Christians in early Christian writings. The Christian life is social, not solitary, and the symbol of this brotherhood is the Sacrament of *The Lord's Supper.* "For we, being many, are one bread, one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." With all the imperfection which attaches, and must ever cling, to the observance of the Lord's Supper in the Church, there is still no place, out of Heaven itself, so suggestive of the idea of Christian brotherhood as the Lord's Table. It is also part of the New Testament idea of the Church that it is a *visible* community. "The two universal rites of the new society—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—show that it was a visible thing. St. Paul makes it clear that entrance into the Church was by the visible rite of Baptism, and that he himself had come into the Church by this door. The Lord's Supper was a visible, social institution, and could only occupy the

[1] *The Church and the Ministry*, p. 6.

place that it did in a visible society." [1] And the Church of Christ is a *sacerdotal* society. What do we mean by this? We mean what St. Peter says, when he uses the phrase, "an holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices." At the Reformation much stress was laid on that which was called "the priesthood of all believers." So Luther describes the service of the Communion: "There our priest or minister stands before the altar, having been publicly called to the priestly function: he repeats publicly and distinctly Christ's words of the institution: he takes the bread and wine, and distributes it according to Christ's word: and we all kneel beside him and around him, men and women, young and old, master and servant, mistress and maid, all holy priests together, sanctified by the blood of Christ. We are there in our priestly dignity. We do not let the priest proclaim for himself the ordinance of Christ: but he is the mouthpiece of us all, and we all say it with him, in our heart, with true faith in the Lamb of God who feeds us with His body and blood." In the Lord's Supper we act as priests, "an holy priesthood," and we offer unto God a spiritual sacrifice and thanksgiving for the gift of His grace in Jesus Christ and His death for us.

[1] *The Church and the Ministry*, p. 16.

II.

If this be so, the obligation resting on all who belong to this brotherhood, to keep the feast in which we offer the sacrifice which is the crown of Christian worship, becomes obvious. We owe it to our Lord, to ourselves, to our fellow-Christians, and to the world. It is the public, personal, and voluntary act by which "we ratify the deed of Baptism." For in our baptism, as the children of professed believers, there was previously expressed and sealed our relation to Christ and His Church. We owe it to Christ to enter the company which He has gathered around Himself. To be a disciple secretly is surely an unmanly thing. And the Lord's Supper is the rite of initiation into the society. We owe it to ourselves, for the Christian life is social, and the fellowship of the Church tends to its fuller development. Church membership is not theoretically essential to the Christian life. Practically it is essential to a healthy, hearty spiritual growth. We owe it to our fellow-Christians. We depend largely upon them for increase of spiritual life and well-being : they in like manner depend upon us for certain elements in a full Christian experience. Finally, we owe it to the world

which waits to be redeemed. "For a Christian to separate himself from the Church is to condemn himself to inefficiency. As well might a private soldier separate himself from the commander and his army and propose to attack the enemy according to his own private plan of campaign with his own puny resources." [1]

III.

What, then, is the process of initiation? "What is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper?" That something is required is manifest when we think of the Church as a society invested by her Lord with authority over her members. And it is this initiatory procedure which deters many who for various other reasons would like to identify themselves with the Church. People are certainly kept out of the Church by dread of the ordeal which they suppose they have to undergo. It is necessary, therefore, to explain fully what, according to the teaching and practice of the Presbyterian Church, is required of those who make profession for the first time of their faith in Christ. Here let me try to remove a misconception that arises out of

[1] *Christian Conduct*, by T. B. Kilpatrick, D.D., p. 134.

our inaccurate use of the familiar expression "joining the Church." We do not "join the Church" at our first communion. The teaching of our catechisms is that the Church of Christ consists of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, "together with their children." As the children of parents making a profession of faith, we never joined the Church, because we were always in it. Our baptism was the recognition of our membership in the Church, and the seal of it. In coming for the first time to the Lord's Table, we simply pass from the position of children in the household to that of members in full communion. But in making this transition from youth to full age there is a responsibility which belongs to the Church by its office-bearers, and a responsibility which belongs to ourselves. Let us take the last point first. It is manifest from the New Testament that "the Lord's Supper is designed for disciples of Christ as such, and not for men in general or the world at large." It is equally plain that by disciples are meant Christians. Hence the exhortation of St. Paul, "Let a man examine himself." In other words, we have to decide, so far as that is possible, whether we are really Christ's disciples. Now, in this connection, let us bear in mind one or two things which may help towards an intelligent decision. There are lines

in life which we sometimes cross without knowing we have crossed them—the line, for example, between youth and manhood, and this line between the world and the Church. It is often, though not always, crossed unconsciously, and we afterwards learn by simple but sufficient tests that we have crossed it. It is not necessary, let it be said at once, to be able to fix the date of your conversion. Some have been 'in Christ' from childhood, and by them conversion was not needed. Others can say with reference to their soul's awakening, with Zechariah, "The angel came and wakened me as a man that is awakened out of his sleep." It is possible to waken beneath the kiss of God, and with His gentle call in our ears, to a sense of His presence and the reality of His love. "My conversion to the Lord Jesus," said one, "might with propriety be compared to a mother rousing an infant with a kiss." Others are more distinctly conscious that, at the moment when they became Christians, they underwent a moral and spiritual revolution, and, in apostolic language, passed from death to life. It is a matter of little moment *when* or *how* you were converted : but it is all-important to be reasonably assured that you *have* begun the Christian life ; though for those whose honest search for reasonable evidence of such a change has been

unsuccessful, the Church makes the wise provision that "one may have a true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof."[1] One is not to stay away from the Lord's Table for want of such assurance, for the observance of the Lord's command may be just the means whereby an assurance of being "in Christ" will be given to him. Still, "it is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's Body, of their faith to feed upon Him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience, lest coming unworthily they eat and drink judgment to themselves."[2] And, "to have so many different aspects of Christianity presented to us is of great help to self-examination in two ways. It enables those who are beginners in the Christian life the better to recognise it in themselves, since the existence of any one of these graces or exercises may give good ground for hope, and some may find in themselves one of these, while others may find another. On the other hand, since all these are inseparable, their variety serves as a searching test of the genuineness of each."[3] But let it be remembered that

[1] *Larger Catechism*, Q. 172.
[2] *Shorter Catechism*, Q. 97.
[3] Candlish's *The Sacraments*, p. 108.

the responsibility of a decision regarding our personal relation to the Lord Jesus Christ is certainly our own. Yet that responsibility must be shared in some measure by the Church. The Church must seek to ascertain, in the case of all intending communicants, whether they understand the meaning of the ordinance, and whether they are making a credible profession of Christianity, one which is borne out by a consistent behaviour. In regard to this, as on all other points relating to the sacraments, the Presbyterian Church holds a middle course between Churches that "confirm" candidates for communion at a certain age and as a matter of course, and Churches which take on themselves to decide regarding conversion. It has been well expressed by Dr. R. S. Candlish: "The principle, as it is notorious the Presbyterian Church has always held it, does not constitute the pastor, elders, or congregation judges of the actual conversion of the applicant, but, on the contrary, lays much of the responsibility upon the applicant himself. The minister and kirk-session must be satisfied as to his competent knowledge, credible profession, and consistent Christian walk. They must determine negatively that there is no reason for pronouncing him not a Christian, but they do not undertake the responsibility of positively judging

of his conversion." The responsibility for coming to the Lord's Table is in the last issue one's own, and must be dealt with sincerely by every professing Christian. The assurance of being in Christ is seldom withheld where it is earnestly sought, but the lack of it makes it the duty of those who are in doubt to labour to have their doubts removed; and so doing they may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, which is appointed for the relief of even weak and doubting Christians. "The end of our coming thither is not to make protestation that we are upright or just in our lives, but we come to seek our life and perfection in Jesus Christ."

IV.

One would fain be able to write helpfully regarding the hindrances which deter so many young men and women from coming to the Lord's Table. That they exist is only too evident from the fact that the ranks in church membership, as they are broken by death and otherwise, are not filled as one would like to see from the midst of families by young people coming forward to acknowledge for themselves the obligations involved in Baptism.

One would fain discover what the real hindrances are to the approach of many who are Christians in heart. Perhaps one of them is the uncertainty at what age such a profession of faith is expected and should be made. Our Church says that the Lord's Supper is for "such as are of years and ability to examine themselves." But it is well for us to realise that the question of age has little or nothing to do with it. There are Churches—those which practise the rite of confirmation—in which the matter is avowedly regulated by age; and the good side of that idea is that it brings young people under training for assuming the responsibilities of church membership in early life. The defective element in that way of dealing with the matter is the tendency to obscure the necessity for an act of personal decision and consecration as a step towards communion for the first time. Still, in my own experience, I have had the greatest satisfaction in receiving and admitting to Church privileges those who were really *young* communicants. The Church which requires that an intending communicant for the first time should seek for evidence of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ will have its reward in the genuineness of the profession made by those who come, even though such a requirement may prevent

large numerical accessions. And, after all, is it not enough to answer the question, "When should I come to the Table of the Lord?" by saying, "Whenever you have come to the Lord of the Table." At the present time it is not quite easy to get at what might be called the real hindrance to making profession of faith for the first time. Possibly it may be sought and found in a vague undefined scepticism, a doubt as to how much truth there is in Christianity, in the form in which it is presented by the ordinary Church teaching. To that may be added also the practical difficulty—which in individual cases it is hard to remove—as to what is meant by coming to Christ, and believing in Him. By all means let those who are conscious of these or similar hindrances speak frankly of them to the Church, through her ministers and office-bearers. For if hindrances of that kind are taken out of the way, no other kind of obstacle is worth consideration. We are very familiar with such secondary difficulties as the fear of eating and drinking unworthily—the vague feeling of a wish to be better prepared—the inconsistent lives of professing Christians who are communicants—the fear of not being able to live up to the profession involved in being a communicant—the impression that one can be as good a Christian out of the

Church as in it—the excuse that the Church is not pure enough—the reluctance to accept all the doctrines of the Church—the disposition to wait until joined by others—the common resolve to put off till the next time. What are they all when we weigh them against the plain duty which rests on all professing disciples to do this in remembrance of Christ, which comes to all as a command, and is laden also with the pathos of a last request? We ought to take ourselves very seriously to task for yielding to any or all such pleas, remembering that they often proceed from cowardice rather than from conscience; and that, if we believe in Christ, and are ready to acknowledge Him as Master and Lord, we have no right to set aside His wish that we should acknowledge Him in this way. It is the one way by which we can be regularly and steadily counted on Christ's side. The Church needs us to fill up the ranks of professing Christians. And, above all, however we may serve God outside the Church, it is by visible fellowship with the people of God that our spiritual life will most surely grow. Is there not a great promise attached to the fulfilment of our Lord's command: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in Heaven"?

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